

Oath of Office Ceremony
Supervisor Mitzelfelt Comments
December 1, 2008

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would like to begin by congratulating my colleagues: Josie Gonzales, with whom I've had the pleasure of serving the past several years, and also Neil Derry, a new voice representing the Third District, and who I'm proud to add is a fellow Marine Corps Desert Storm Veteran. Welcome Neil. Congratulations to both of you and thank you to everyone in attendance today for taking time out of your busy day to join us.

Twenty-two months ago, on January 10, 2007, I was appointed as the 32nd person since 1853 to represent the First District in San Bernardino County. From Needles to Twentynine Palms to Barstow and the Victor Valley, I'm blessed to represent the largest County Supervisory District in the contiguous United States. From Wrightwood in the San Gabriel Mountains to most of the Mojave Desert; from Lucerne Valley to Parker Dam on the Colorado River, to Baker, Trona and Red Mountain on the Kern County line. The First District borders the states of Arizona and Nevada and includes portions of Joshua Tree and Death Valley National Parks, the entire Mojave National Preserve, the Marine Corps Logistics Base in Barstow, the Army's National Training Center at Fort Irwin, the former George Air Force Base (now Southern California Logistics Airport) in Victorville, and portions of the Marine Corps Air-Ground Combat Center in Twentynine Palms, the Naval Weapons Center at China Lake, and Edwards Air Force Base.

I was selected from a field of 13 applicants by the Board of Supervisors to fill a vacancy on this body and, after two days of public interviews and several hours of deliberations, I received the required three votes from this Board. My swearing-in occurred within two minutes of that vote and it wasn't in front of my family or close friends because two minutes earlier, I had no idea I'd be selected. So, this is quite a different experience.

For one thing, I appreciate the fact that I had a little bit more time to decide what I was going to say to this gathering today. I don't remember what I said two years ago. So first off, it would be appropriate to thank my incumbent colleagues who are all here and voted to give me this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, which the voters of the First District have now extended from a two-year to a six-year journey in my lifetime mission of public service. I thank you all.

Let me explain why this is such a big deal. For one thing, we're one of the few counties where the Board gets to appoint Supervisors to fill vacancies. In general law counties, that's the responsibility of the Governor, but our County Charter allows our Board to make that most critical decision.

The second fact is, once the appointment is made by the Board, they can't undo it. I'm sure there were a few times (laughter) – am I right? They wished that weren't the case. Anyway, all kidding aside, we certainly don't always agree, but we work pretty well together and it's always been in the best interests of our citizens. I think we have had some very healthy disagreements in addition to our success working together as a team.

I've had an interesting run over 22 months, as I mentioned, serving out really someone else's term when that vacancy came about. I had to make an adjustment coming, as Chief of Staff for my predecessor, out from behind the scenes and then being a public person... that was an adjustment to make. Then I had to go through what I considered a reverse campaign. I was in office and now I had to go tell the voters why I'm the guy that should be in that office. It's kind of a tough sell, I'll tell you. But presenting yourself to constituents who didn't vote for you is a rare opportunity, actually, because the voters in First District, the citizens, they are a demanding boss; however, they appreciate hard work and straightforward people representing them and I think that I convinced them that that's who I am. And I know that's who I am.

The campaign itself was a fifteen-month effort, long and very grueling. We had three opponents on the ballot. In June, we were blessed to have 62.5% of the vote and really the best part of that was not only the vote of confidence, but it was the fact that I did not have to run again in November because I got more than 50% of the vote. So, I was very pleased and I want to thank the voters of First District who entrusted their confidence in me.

As I mentioned, my life in public service began in the U.S. Marine Corps and later included service at the State and Local level. I consider this a great opportunity to serve and I'm humbled and grateful to have it. County Supervisors truly are in the best position to positively impact the lives of their constituents and doing so within a county of 2 million residents, 20,000 square miles, being the 5th most populous in the State of California, and the 12th most populous in the Nation; this is really a rare opportunity to serve.

That service sometimes takes many different forms. In addition to sitting with this Board, it includes being, in my case, Chairman of the Victor Valley Economic Development Authority, which is the re-use authority for George Air Force Base, which was closed in the early 1990s; also the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District, Victor Valley Transit Authority, Victor Valley Wastewater Reclamation Authority, Local Agency Formation Commission, San Bernardino Associated Governments, which is our transportation commission, the State Seismic Safety Commission, National Association of Counties committee member, Quad State Local Governments Authority Vice Chair, and Chairman of the High Desert Corridor Authority, among several others. So, we wear a lot of different hats which really adds a bit more to the opportunity, but also to the challenge of this job.

Now I would like to thank the people without whom I would not be sitting before you today. First, my family. My wife, Megan, if you'd raise your hand, Megan, without whom, I could not be here and without whose strength and support I would not be able to handle the pressure. So thank you. I would also like to thank and introduce my mother, Louena Teschendorf. Could you stand?

I'm so pleased to have my family here. My father, Dr. H. Vincent Mitzelfelt and his wife, Karin. My sister, Dawna Coote, and her husband Brian; and my nieces must stand up, Alexandra and Amanda. Thank you all for driving from Phoenix. And I would also like to take this moment to honor the memory of my late stepfather, Donald "Smoky" Teschendorf.

Next, I would like to thank my staff who does the real work in my office. They include, I would like you to raise your hand if you are present: Paula Nowicki, my Chief of Staff. There's a bunch of names here, you might want to hold your applause. Next Michael Orme, Deputy Chief of Staff; Vicki Kratzke, Analyst; Joyce Micallef, Analyst; Andrew Silva, Analyst; David Zook, Communications Director; Robert Eland, John Richardson, Field Representatives; Dawn Sikes, Constituent Services Manager; Jessie Flores, Field Representative; Laurie Hunter, Special Assistant; Trish Lawrence and Lu Russ, Executive Board Secretaries. Also we have community liaisons Garner Morris and Gil Zank. I want to thank all of you for your hard work.

And my campaign team: On Site Manager, Michael Orme. My consultant, Jim Nygren. Finance Director, Diane Stone. Website Coordinator, Eric Linder. Headquarters Manager, Janie Palubin. Volunteer Coordinator, Dennis Nowicki, Jr. Also, thanks to John Richardson and Robert Eland for putting in a lot of your personal time to help make sure we were successful. I would also like to thank Martha Brody; Ryan McEachron; Mark Forbes and family; Rob Masseth and family; McKenzie Tennison, Barron Wilson and family; Cathy Smith and Matt Nowicki. I appreciate all of your help.

I would also like to introduce a few people who are here from the District that I would like to acknowledge. We have the soon to be Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem of City of Hesperia, Thurston "Smitty" Smith, here with us. Thank you for being here. Councilmember from the City of Needles, Rebecca Valentine is here. Mayor of Apple Valley, Tim Jasper is here. Newly elected Victorville City Councilman Ryan McEachron. We have Bob Smith, newly elected to the Yermo Community Services District and a good friend. Representing Assemblyman Anthony Adams, another good friend – Steve Johnson, District Director. Field Representative for Sharon Runner, Assemblywoman. Dennis Morris. Thank you for being here.

I would also like to thank some personal friends who have given me great support and they include Frank Williams, Jeff Gibson and Reggie King, I believe Reggie's here.

And I would like to thank my longtime friend Judge Jim McDonald, for coming all the way from Colorado to swear me in today. Thank you, Jim.

And I would like to thank our County's outstanding employees and our safety employees, including our Sheriff's Deputies and Deputy District Attorneys and Fire Fighters for their support.

We have accomplished much in the past few years. We helped improve public safety by helping expand the capacity of our jails while increasing fire protection and child predator controls and gang suppression and intervention. We helped create a sex offender tracking team within the Sheriff's Crimes Against Children unit and we created and expanded a program to identify and deport illegal alien criminals in our jails.

We have fought and will continue to fight for public access to public lands and the rights of private property owners.

We are helping establish an aviation technical training school at the Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville and we've helped double Victor Valley's College's registered nursing training enrollment.

And we are contributing millions of dollars toward youth and after-school programs to provide high risk kids with constructive, fun and educational activities in a safe environment.

And we have for the first time brought graffiti abatement to the First District.

As you know, we're in an economic downturn unlike any of us have seen in modern times. We are experiencing staggering job losses, rising unemployment, and a decimated housing industry. But we have and continue to work on solutions to these problems. One of our top priorities is bringing employers, trade and the infrastructure that will attract the same to our region.

Later today, we will create a public-private partnership, which I am honored to be joining in leading with our Chairman, to tackle our housing foreclosure crisis head-on by leveraging public dollars with private dollars and ensuring policies that will speed dormant homes back into local, owner-occupied ownership. We know we can partially insulate ourselves against global, national and economic trends by taking advantage of our assets as a region, especially in the High Desert, with our affordable land, with our available workforce, affordable housing, recreation, clean air and water and business-friendly local governments, including the County of San Bernardino.

We will build the High Desert Corridor to include a new highway and rail from Palmdale to Victorville's intermodal railway and airport. I'm proud to have led this effort as the founding Chairman of the Joint Powers Authority along with Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich.

We will build our regional transportation improvements to accommodate our growing population, including the Ranchero Road interchange and widening in Hesperia, Nisqually interchange in Victorville, Yucca Loma Bridge in Apple Valley, Highway 395 widening in Adelanto, and Lenwood crossing in Barstow, just to name a few.

We will also be at the epicenter of future development of substantial renewable energy generation projects, including solar and wind, without compromising our desert environment.

We need to set up funding mechanisms for our economic development efforts and I am going to be advocating different ways of doing that including allocating more or all of the transient occupancy tax to economic development. We need to continue to establish a first-rate film and tourism office, in our economic development agency, initiate a Route 66 advertising program, create an enterprise overlay district to promote tourism. We need to establish more redevelopment areas and we should not take no for an answer from the state. We need more redevelopment areas.

As stewards of taxpayers' funds we should continue to be careful about expenditures. Our fiscal policies recently earned us a bond rating increase from A to A+ by Fitch ratings. We need to continue to preserve and build upon the policies that earned us that distinction.

We should have departments identify the 10% or even more...during the last downturn we received plans for 30% cuts...that they would cut if they needed to and this is a great exercise because it helps to see what the priorities are from the people who are on the ground providing the services to our constituents and it helps us to make the tough decisions that are inevitably on their way.

We need to study, continue to study the long term costs of our obligations, including our retirement system.

We need to increase interdepartmental collaboration and improve interagency cooperation. We should work more closely with our cities to collaborate in ways that will benefit our mutual constituents. I'd like to create a Mayor's Council which would be composed of every mayor in my District; Mayor Jasper has started this effort already. More than 75% of my constituents live in cities, so it makes eminent sense to maximize our collaborative work with the seven cities in the First District.

I believe we need to allocate our increased payment in lieu of taxes money from the Federal Government for remote desert fire stations. We finally won a \$5 million increase. We need to finish building our countywide fire infrastructure using these funds and this is in addition to the new stations in Baker and that are under development in Hesperia, Oak Hills, Phelan and Needles. We're bringing a new Veteran's memorial park to Wrightwood and a new library to Phelan, I'm happy to announce. We are also working on expanding the Barstow Sheriff's Station and developing a new Victor Valley Sheriff's Station.

I also want to continue to bring cultural and entertainment amenities that are so sorely needed in the High Desert including athletic facilities, sporting and performing arts venues, a new YMCA...because we don't have one, at least not a traditional one...more and expanded Boys and Girls Clubs and more.

And we also need to work with the BLM and the park service. I have 8 million acres of public lands in the First District so we have to work with these agencies to improve fire protection, first and foremost, police protection, as well as economic development, tourism and conservation. There's a lot that can be done; we can do a much better job. We are doing better but we can still do better.

The High Desert Trauma Center needs to be brought closer to reality. We will continue to work on that. We have other infrastructure projects that are long overdue that are very expensive and I'm committed to building bridges, water storage, future water supplies, completing the construction of the High Desert Government Center, including seismic safety; a very high seismic safety rating so that we can use it as a critical facility in case of a major earthquake...to do less as the Seismic Safety Commissioner would not be acceptable, so I'm very serious about that and I believe we've got a plan that's going to work and that new center in Hesperia is going to be a great asset for the High Desert.

I don't know what the economy or other circumstances are going to bring us as a Board. I do know that we not only have the opportunity, but we have a necessity to reinvent ourselves to make tough decisions for the greater good. In short, to lead; which during challenging times is so critical. We, I included, have been through tough times before in this institution. I understand that I have a duty to work with this board to help serve the entire County, not just my district, and that by helping my colleagues and other elected officials, including the Sheriff and District Attorney, serve their constituents, the whole County will benefit.

I also understand and with deep gratitude acknowledge that we stand on the shoulders of our staffs and the 17,000 hard working county employees who make this organization work.

In addition to representing this County, we Supervisors represent first and foremost its citizens as their direct representatives. I accept that responsibility with humility and a sense of duty.

I pledge my very best efforts over the next four years as I occupy this seat of responsibility and trust on behalf of the people of San Bernardino County.

Thank you again for this opportunity to serve.